

The big news this year is clearly the national economy, which continues to struggle. Our economy has shed millions of jobs in the last 18 months and needs help.

In an effort to create jobs and jumpstart our economy, the Congress crafted an economic stimulus package that the president signed in February. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is expected to create or save more than 3.5 million jobs over two years, invest billions of dollars in our nation's infrastructure and offer vital assistance to millions of families who have lost their income.

The Recovery Act also gave working Americans the largest income tax cut ever, putting more money into wallets of middle-class Americans and more money into the struggling economy. In addition to the "Making Work Pay" tax credit, individuals who receive Social Security, Supplemental Security Income and benefit payments from the Veterans Administration will receive one-time, \$250 payments. The payments, intended to help those groups most at risk during this economic downturn, are already starting to go out and should wrap up by early summer.

The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act was also signed into law, the first major piece of legislation to be enacted in 2009. This law revises the statute of limitations for equal-pay lawsuits, allowing individuals who have illegally received lower wages to sue for compensation. This is an important step to leveling the playing field for women and men in the workplace.

The House and the Senate also passed a budget that includes many of the president's priorities, including health care and education reform, renewable energy provisions and a hefty tax cut for the middle class.

This will be a very important year for directing where our economy will head over the next several decades, and the investments and priorities that are being established will ensure our country is headed in the right direction.

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